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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the challenges and problems facing managers in modern organizations and examines the implications of those challenges for the education and professional development of management personnel. The author illustrates his discussion by focusing mainly on the management of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, but he argues that the same basic phenomena and relationships occur in educational organizations and many other organizations as well. He begins by pointing out the potential conflict between the creative specialists and managers in an organization and suggests that the best solution is through enabling specialists to become managers. Regardless of their background, though, one of the most important things managers do is to manage the future. One mistake of management education in the 1960s, he argues, was overemphasizing solutions for specific future problems rather than educating people to handle change in general. He concludes that the aim of education for managers must be to prepare them to deal flexibly with an uncertain future, through training in the "old" field of the humanities and in the "new" field of the behavioral sciences. (JG)

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AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION

FOURTH NATIONAL CONFERENCE
BRISBANE 21 – 26 AUGUST 1977

THE ABC AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

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I think you should know at the outset that I didn't choose the title of this address. It was put to me by Dr. Grassie and, being without inspiration myself at the time, I obediently accepted it. I did suggest, however, that I would probably wish to wander some way from its strict terms, but without departing too far from what I believe to be the broad concerns of this Conference. And that, I find on reflection, is what I have done! The ABC is simply my launch-pad.

From what I've been told about this Conference - "a conference for those who administer and those who teach about administration" - it seems to me that it has probably brought together much the same kind of people as President Truman spoke to at Princeton almost exactly thirty years ago. On that occasion he said this: "In our free society knowledge and learning are endowed with a public purpose - a noble purpose, close to the heart of democracy. That purpose is to help men and women develop their talents for the benefit of their fellow citizens." President Truman was particularly concerned at that time with what he called the "matter of unprecedented magnitude and complexity" which administrators in the public sector were expected to deal with; but what he had to say at Princeton was relevant to any big organisation. "All large organisations, public or private", he went on, "depend on the teamwork of specialists. Co-ordination is achieved by administrators trained to assemble the fruits of specialised knowledge and to build on that foundation a sound final decision."

What the United States has done in this field since President Truman's day is something which Professor Schmuck can, no doubt, tell you. It's the problem of the training of administrators and managers to which I want to direct my attention, rather than concentrating on the professional development of specialists within their own specialisation, however important that is too. It's the problem of giving people who will be managers the right kind of experience now. That, of course, doesn't mean that we should overlook the people who are already managers but who, if they are to be effective at higher levels of responsibility in the future, equally need special experience now. The challenge, as I see it, is to arrange the appropriate continuing education that will help them develop their talents for the benefit, as Truman put it, of their fellow citizens - which, in this case, means learning to manage groups of their fellow citizens. The management of people, they will have to learn, is not merely as important as the management of, say, a computer-controlled inventory system: it is of paramount importance. That is outstandingly the case in the public sector, and I say that based on many years experience in one area of public enterprise - national broadcasting.

The Australian Broadcasting Commission - the ABC - is a large organisation by Australian standards, with an annual expenditure now of around $137 million and a staff of about 6,500. The governing body is the Commission itself - eleven people each appointed for a term of three years and drawn from all States of the Commonwealth. They are accountable, not to the Government of the day but to Parliament and, through Parliament, to the Australian people. They are responsible for formulating the ABC's program policy, and for fulfilling the charge laid upon them by

the Broadcasting and Television Act to ensure that the public is provided with "adequate and comprehensive programs" in the full development of which the Commission can take whatever measures it considers necessary in the interests of the community. You probably won't be surprised to know that this requirement to provide "adequate and comprehensive programs" attracts almost as many different subjective interpretations as there are listeners and viewers. As a corporate aim it lacks precision, and any member of the staff with a claim to professionalism has strong views about what it should mean.

The ABC's staff come from an unusually wide variety of professional backgrounds. There are program-makers with University qualifications in Arts, Economics, Science, Education, Music. There are others with experience in the theatre or films or in Journalism. Some, but not many, come to us with experience in commercial broadcasting, and a few make the journey in the opposite direction. And here let me say,in passing, that I think the industry as a whole would benefit if it were possible to change employment conditions in such a way as to encourage and facilitate staff movement back and forth between the national and commercial sectors.

You will also find among our staff other professional people - highly skilled Engineers, Accountants and Lawyers. A high proportion of our staff join the ABC early in their working life. They see it as a career organisation. Middle level and senior positions are usually - but not always - filled from within the service. The terms and conditions of employment for ABC staff are similar to those in the Australian Public Service: they must be approved by the Public Service Board.

Now the basic purpose of a national broadcasting service is to provide programs for all sections of the community. All the rest, as a Canadian report put it, is housekeeping. Programs are made by creative people. And one of the potential sources of conflect is the relationship between those creative people and management. This is really not surprising. Managers tend to work in one way and program makers tend to work in a way which is quite different - almost at times, it seems, diametrically different.

Managers, more often than not, feel they should introduce - and therefore try to introduce - some element of scientific analysis into the way in which they make decisions. They like to try to plan a long way ahead; they feel generally more comfortable if they can bring activities within a set of rules and procedures; they feel they are working best when they can make decisions in an atmosphere of detachment and even impersonality.

On the other hand creative people emphasise the importance of imagination. They test ideas against what their instinct and their aesthetic judgement tell them. It's in the nature of their activity that they often know for certain that one program idea is better than another without being able, beyond a certain limit, to explain precisely why they think so. They feel they

can work best when they are unconstrained by systems and precedents. Their emotions are often deeply involved in their work. Most managers, they believe, simply get in the way.

In fact, many of our ABC managers were once employed as program-makers, and our managerial decisions often have a high "program content", if I can put it that way, directly affecting the way in which program-makers do their work, and hopefully making it possible for them to work better. Nevertheless, the ordinary daily routines of managers and program-makers are very different, and it can easily be suggested that the two seem to be serving different systems and adhering to different values.

In this connection, the recent report by the Annan Committee on "The Future of Broadcasting" in Britain included some interesting observations by Anthony Smith who, under the auspices of the International Broadcast Institute (now the International Institute of Communications), was asked by the Committee to examine the relationship between program-makers and management in a number of national broadcasting organisations. He found that in many European organisations "the profession of program-making is the core of the system, and 'management' is a 'set of procedures' and structures rising above the level of program making." In Britain, however, Mr. Smith found the whole production function is embraced within the managerial process: the producer occupying one rung on "an institutional ladder". He is, Mr. Smith observed, "a creative official, as well as a creative professional." Smith also noted that by placing the producer closer to management - which is what we seek to do in the ABC - management shares a far more collective experience in production. The flow to the program-maker of guidance, instruction and appeal is part of a social pattern, as well as an organisational one. What has to be remembered - and some people outside the broadcasting industry find this difficult to understand - is, as the Annan Committee points out, that if guidance takes the form of rigid directives on a multitude of topics, it will, more often than not, stifle creativity and diversity of approach.

The creative program-makers generally think of themselves as professionals and they resent suggestions that they are not members of a recognised profession. There is no professional body of broadcasters , such as Doctors and Lawyers have, to preserve standards of practice and to discipline errant members. If you accept George Bernard Shaw's complaint that "all professions are conspiracies against the laity", then I suppose one shouldn't mind doing without a professional label. But program-makers do tend to mind very much if their ideas of program quality are criticised by non program-makers. The Annan Committee, to which I referred earlier, felt that program-makers are sometimes too dismissive of the views of the general public about programs, particularly about the amount of violence and sex and bad language which some producers feel their programs must have - always for, to them - valid aesthetic reasons, of course.

It seems to me that the words "profession" and "professionalism"

are used pretty loosely these days to cover anything which the speaker happens to think well of. The Fulton Committee, which examined the Civil Service in Britain nearly ten years ago, thought that the word "professional" implied two main attributes. One is that of being skilled in one's job - having skill which comes from training and sustained experience. Many people have that. But they don't necessarily have the second attribute which Fulton defined as being able to conceive of the work in abstract terms - having the fundamental knowledge of, and deep familiarity with, a subject that enables a man or a woman to move with ease among its concepts.

Broadcasting, like education, needs its specialist professionals to do the work for which the organisation was originally established. Broadcasting needs program-makers: education needs teachers. Those professionals will fulfil the primary functions of their organisations, provided they meet Fulton's first requirement - skill learnt from training and sustained experience.

But where will the managers come from? Who will keep some order among the disorder of creative activity? Who will do the housekeeping? One approach adopted in some organisations, as I've already indicated, is to have a parallel group of people to manage the professional specialists - to devise a "set of procedures and structures" to take charge of policy and financial matters. But the disadvantages of this approach are clear, and they tend to compound the fact that the specialists and the managers often view each other with suspicion and incomprehension. One can do something about this; but in broadcasting, as in education, the better way, I believe, is through enabling specialists to become managers. Program-makers are probably best managed by people who first had experience themselves as program-makers. Teachers are perhaps best managed by people who know from personal experience what the forthcoming day is likely to have in store for a teacher when he or she wakes up in the morning.

To bring this about, we need to do a number of things. First, we have to be sure that the numbers of people recruited, and their quality, are adequate for the task. And there's more to it than just getting the pay and conditions right. There must be training prospects and job satisfaction. The image and reputation of the job among colleagues and in the world outside have to be considered.

It's not hard to work out a number of useful training courses. But actually putting the training into practice is a different matter. Fulton spoke somewhat airily of residential training colleges, large training centres and so on. Beyond this prodigality, not even a Royal Commission can provide what is needed above all else - time. There's never a right time for a man or a woman to leave the job and go away for some weeks to study. There's never enough time to spare. There's invariably a shortage of staff, or an unrealistically low staff establishment. Retirements come at the wrong time, and often there are age blocks in the system. The efforts of senior management are too often

too much concerned with keeping the corporate ship afloat today, and too little concerned with where the ship ought to be preparing to go in the future, and far too seldom concerned with training the next management generation.

Not every specialist, of course, wants to go into general management. Not every specialist is well advised to want to; some prefer to stay within their specialisation, and some should go on doing the one thing they do well instead of new things they cannot do well. For these people, we must develop - because it is only sensible and just that we do so - a career structure that is not inferior to the structure for managers and administrators.

I think we need also to pay particular attention to what, at first glance, may seem a relatively minor matter: it's the special problem of those who work in the smaller specialised groups in an organisation. And it's important because all too often offices are geographically isolated from the main centres of corporate activity - and that doesn't necessarily mean in a country town: it can be a rented building in the city, but in some mean street where senior management personnel rarely go. Such people often simply do not have an easy opportunity of moving from their own specialist area to the more visible areas of the organisation.

It very often happens, it seems to me, that specialists become managers with reluctance. We're all familiar with the competent specialists who react to the suggestion that they apply for a vacant managerial or administrative post with surprise and apprehension. They doubt whether they would like the job, the duties of which they have in all probability never thought seriously about. They submit an application in the end because the higher salary has some attractions; because enough people just manage to persuade them; or because fear of the job is less than the fear of seeing it taken by someone they think less capable than themselves. It's really not the best way to begin, and yet they may well find, after a while, that the work is not totally new to them, but simply an extension and development of their previous work.

We would do well, I think, to encourage specialists to recognise in themselves, a desire which is present in all good specialists: to master all the aspects of their work. They normally seek to control, very naturally, all the elements which are needed to carry out their professional role, and they equally naturally wish they could set policy objectives. To advance to a management position is simply the logical fulfilment of that wish. There they have the chance to exercise the full range of responsibilities associated with their profession, and to become involved in the formulation of policy or policy recommendations. Failure in a management position, when it happens, is often due to a specialist trying to remain involved in the specialist task and recoiling from the new difficulties of settling personnel matters, ensuring that the budget isn't overspent, and so on. They may well be, of course, the elements in which the organisation has failed to give the specialist some training, and so he, or she, has retreated in

self-defence to familiar areas - the areas the specialist knows best.

But if an organisation is to be guided at the higher levels by the experience of professionals, some of the professionals at least must want to move to management and general administration. I find it interesting, by the way, that the word "administrator" is used freely in the public sector and much less freely in commerce and industry, where anybody who is somebody is a manager. You don't find the private sector making much use of "administrator". The difference between the two words isn't clear at the best of times. One can, I suppose, describe someone carrying responsibility for running a unit working within his own profession - a chief engineer managing other engineers for example - as a manager: and someone concerned with people in many diverse professions or specialist areas as an administrator. But what we shouldn't overlook, whether we're talking of administrators or managers, is the need for the person given such responsibility to offer leadership. What is the function of leadership? I can do no better than quote Norman Cousins, the editor of Saturday Review. He said it was this: "To convert large problems into opportunities, to inspire people to meet difficult challenges, and to brood creatively about purpose." It also involves the ability to give"high priority to ideas."

What then do I suggest we want managers to do? One of the signs that the study of management is still in a fairly rudimentary state is that we still haven't got a useful definition of what management is, or what a manager is. The dictionary writers have some difficulty here. For example, the fifth edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary gives us a definition of "manage" that puts first, some meanings to do with training horses or using tools which, I suppose, gives some idea of the importance of things. But the dictionary goes on to tell us that "manage" can mean to conduct an undertaking, or control a household or institution or a Province or a State; or it can mean to take charge of something - and it gives "cattle" as its example of the sort of things a manager might conceivably take charge of! Or it can mean to subject a person or an animal to one's control. Or it can mean to gain one's ends with a person by flattery or dictation, although the latest edition of the Oxford Concise - the sixth - published a few months ago, does add the possible additional meaning of gaining one's ends by tact - and that, I suggest, may well be a sign of the times. Incidentally, the new Pocket Oxford Australian Dictionary suggests that human behaviour is even worse here than the sages in Oxford encounter: it adds the meanings of "cajole" and "contrive". And what does "management" mean? Oxford tells us that in ordinary verbal use it means trickery or deceit, or it means the people managing a business - and one is left feeling that most people think the terms are interchangeable: going to talk to the management means going to talk to the tricksters and deceivers!

None of that, however, is what we want managers to do, and you may be a little surprised when I suggest that one of the most important things we do want them to do is to manage the future, and to manage the changes through which we must pass between now and the future. Let me explain. The decisions a manager takes are essentially about what will be done next - later today, or tomorrow, next week,

next year or ten years from now. That means we have to help people learn now to judge what the future will be like, and how to make decisions now that will change the present to harmonise with a future world. And that's a task that only adventurous people might consider attractive.

Think for a moment of the way our perceptions of the future have changed. Think back to the 1960s - the way we were then and the way we saw the future then. At that time your profession of education was an expanding one - like other professions - like the economy as a whole. We believed then that we lived in an era of rising expectations, and we believed that we could probably meet those expectations. We thought there was even greater prosperity ahead and that, from that prosperity, we would be able to meet additional demands made on the educational system. We thought then that the harder problems might be connected with increased leisure, with people earning enough in four days to want three days a week off. No one spoke of unemployment as a problem. The shortage wasn't of jobs, but of people.

In the 60s, we didn't foresee with accuracy the sort of world we now in fact live in. So, in the first place, we simply got the facts wrong. We failed to predict accurately that in the mid-1970s we would be living in an era of declining expectations or, at best, static expectations and, in any case, expectations characterised by apprehension and fearfulness.

But in addition, when we talked about the importance of change and the way we would have to prepare ourselves for change, we thought that change was something we could initiate and control. Now we see change as something that all too often is brought about externally. It acts upon us and the best we can do is react to it, instead of believing we can control it.

One notices, in your own field, the changes among students of their perceptions of the future. In the student activity in Europe and the United States in the 1960s - and to some extent in Australia, too - the students felt that they were part of a new wave of people making choices and initiating change. They were part of the unprecedented expansion of education; they formed the new rising class, reassured on every hand by us that they were important because we would need their skills to help society make the changes we said were desirable. They said - or the activists among them said - that they wanted to make changes of a more radical kind. They had the confidence of a new class, assured of its importance and mercifully free from worries about jobs and incomes. They possessed an ideology, or rather, many ideologies, most of them inimical to the established way of things. They claimed a place in the sun by right of new thinking, based on the unacknowledged fact that society had given them priviliges. They wanted to conquer the old social and political institutions and to remake the world.

Now we can see how astonishingly short-lived that period was. Whereas in the 1960s, any plan to build a new university or any

kind of institution of tertiary education was welcomed by all thoughtful people as a wise decision, now, in the 1970s, we find there is no money for such new institutions. On the contrary, the existing institutions - or many of them - are struggling to survive.

Recent student demonstrations have been of a very different kind. The students who've come ten years after their revolutionary predecessors are not seeking to change things - but to preserve them. And what they wish primarily to preserve is their own position. They're trying to protect the status quo against the cuts in funds which the current world-wide economic crisis is imposing on all our institutions. They're fearful that the educational system society now considers it can afford will not be rich enough to sustain them, and they're fearful that when they have graduated society won't offer them jobs of the status which they once believed their qualifications would guarantee.

That change in student attitudes is, in fact, reflected throughout society. All of us now expect the future to be harder than we thought; and all of us realise that external forces are shaping our future rather than forces which we command.

I think the change is felt most, and resented most, among those who have skills - those who have been students of one kind or another and studied a profession or trade. When they were studying, they expected to win large rewards in return for their investment of time and energy, and often postponement of earnings. Among managers now there's the belief that the marginal rewards for carrying extra responsibility are diminishing and, more importantly, there is the belief that they will diminish further in the future.

I wonder how those managers we were training in the 1960s feel about the way they were left unprepared for the world they now work in. One mistake we made in the 60s was, I think, to place too much emphasis on naming the problems of the future and seeking solutions. We would have done better to educate people to handle change in general, rather than specific changes. But we talked specifically about the problems of growth, of a rapidly expanding gross national product, about the rapid introduction of new and expensive technology, of the desire of people (with their economic needs well and truly satisfied) to get more personal satisfaction from their work and so on. We talked about possible ways of dealing with these questions. But we failed to talk about a future in which the issues turned out to be quite different from what we expected. We failed to train for adaptability.

In John Kenneth Galbraith's major television series "The Age of Uncertainty", which the ABC is now showing, he speaks of successful leaders having "certainty of purpose, and a full commitment to the present anxieties of the people". I don't doubt that our managers share an understanding of the "present anxieties of the people", because they are involved in those anxieties themselves. But "certainty of purpose" is hard to come by in these times. Galbraith wants education "to train leaders, men and women who are equipped with the knowledge and the self-confidence,

and maybe also the self-esteem, to decide for others and then to win acceptance for their will, because that is the meaning of leadership." If one wonders again where the self-confidence will come from in this age of uncertainty, Galbraith's answer is education. "Education still needs to persuade the very best of its products that it qualifies them to take, and to maintain, a stand."

What kind of education? What do managers need to equip them to handle whatever kind of change is likely to come upon us?

There ought to be no further argument that it's as important to be numerate as it is to be literate. It's important to know something about economics, if only as much as is necessary to understand that economists don't agree among themselves, and that therefore their words should be treated with the caution that any discipline deserves when it's not quite a science and not quite an art. It is, too, no longer possible to think anyone well educated who hasn't a grasp of some of the basic scientific ideas. But beyond all these, I wonder if we ought not to be concentrating on two fields - one old, and one quite new.

The old is the tradition of the humanities. What we are passing through now is a crisis of human relations, and Shakespeare or Tolstoy can tell us more about human relations than even an economist on a good day! We're subject to political stresses. But although we live by a democratic faith, it's probably a rare manager who dips into Burke or Abraham Lincoln or Alfred Deakin from time to time. We live in a highly industrialised society; but I wonder how many industrial managers have the kind of grip of basic Marxism which is common intellectual currency in Europe. Like the British, we carry perhaps a little too far our distrust of concepts and ideologies. But the British industrial model is not one of that nation's greatest achievements, and not one we should choose to copy.

The new field is closely related to the humanities and its subject is man - but it's a developing science, too. I mean the use of the behavioural sciences in studying what happens when the majority of people are taken into salaried employment in large bureaucratic institutions. One might do well, of course, to tread cautiously here, for - as with economics - there is much that cannot be scientifically tested. It does, however, take us a few steps beyond totally unscientific hunches and judgements - like the annual report which read "Jones is not a born leader yet."

Some important questions for managers are receiving study based on some theory and a great deal of observation. To take just one example: managers worry a great deal about how many subordinates one manager can lead and direct efficiently. And there's been a conventional wisdom that something like seven is the maximum number. Suppose, however, that a new suggested answer is right and that the number might be as small as one or as great as fifty, and that the important thing to look at is not the magic number,

but at such things as the time the manager must spend alone to get his work done; the time he has for sequential thought, and the technology involved in his operations. Suppose, as I say, that this observation turns out to be valid. There would be first of all a great many organisation charts that could be radically changed. They could be changed now perhaps. But my point here is that if a senior manager has been trained to think of seven as a sensible span of control and he has everything laid out in sevens, the question of change doesn't enter his head unless he is introduced to the new idea that seven has no particular meaning at all. And he won't meet that idea unless he's introduced to the literature of the behavioural sciences.

Suppose, too, that Professor Elliott Jaques is right in his suggestion that in all the organisations he's studied, the number seven turns out to have a quite different significance - that there are no more than seven levels of responsibility. However many levels of managers and executives and heads and deputies the organisation has appointed, there are, in fact, no more than seven zones of responsibility which can be distinguished from each other. Suppose, as I say, that the evidence for Jaques' theory turns out to be overwhelming: it would explain why many organisations with admirable organisation charts are full of people getting in each other's way. It would also explain why some people refer to the manager directly above them as their "boss", but say that, of course, their "real boss" is someone higher up the chart altogether.

And I suspect Elliott Jaques is perfectly right when he says for all the time we spend arguing about levels of responsibility, grades of office, lines of responsibility, chains of command, degree of accountability and so on and so forth, what never gets properly discussed is the simple question "how can we best get the work done?"

The conclusion I reach is that education for management now matters more than before because life seems more difficult than before. We perhaps took the wrong turning some years ago when we defined the problems of the future and set out to educate managers to deal with those specific, named problems. Unexplained phenomena like inflation, which we still don't properly understand, remind us that that external world is capable of springing unpleasant surprises upon us. The aim of education for managers must be to prepare them for a future we cannot see with certainty,by acquiring "old" knowledge and "new" knowledge, practising detachment and objectivity and learning to be flexible in the face of whatever the future brings.

President Truman, to whom I referred earlier, spoke of "matters of unprecedented magnitude and complexity" which managers must deal with. Matters in general haven't become smaller or simpler since he spoke. Nor have the organisations which managers try to run. Society, whether it knows it or not, is asking more of its managers as the matters they have to deal with, and organisations, become more complex. What is not appreciated, I think, is that so much of management today is mediation. Managers now find

themselves increasingly obliged to play the role of mediator, solving problems that arise between departments and sections, among members of staff who, quite properly from their point of view, seek to have their way. And at the top end of the management line, the office of the chief executive - the office of the most senior manager - is the place where you'll find registered all the pressures from both inside and outside the organisation. You can think of it, as Norman Cousins does, as the 'apex' - the culminating point - the one place for the resolution of problems that can't be settled elsewhere. But another meaning of 'apex' now found in the sixth edition of the Oxford Concise is 'climax' and, unfortunately, the bringing of problems to a manager often tends to involve a degree of drama and emotional commitment which bedevils relations among the staff who seek an answer. The principal result of all this is that a manager has less and less time for other major managerial functions. He has difficulty in finding enough spaces of uninterrupted time in which to think through matters he ought to be thinking about - to "brood creatively about purpose." And whether we are talking about a school or a business, a broadcasting organisation or a trade union - or the office of a Prime Minister or a President for that matter - the problem is there and I don't see any easy answer to it. Those senior executives who set guardians at their door to keep people away become isolated, inadequately informed and out of touch with the organisation for which they're responsible. Good assistants can help of course: but they are hard to come by and harder to keep, and they can never, in any event, speak for the manager beyond a certain point. As I say, I don't know the answer to all this, but I do believe it's a management problem which all too often is not recognised, and which certainly hasn't received sufficient serious attention. President Truman saw the point and he defined it in his direct and pithy way. "I sit here all day", he once said, "trying to persuade people to do the things they ought to have sense enough to do without my persuading them."

Mr. Chairman - ladies and gentlemen - I'm perfectly well aware that I haven't provided you with answers to all the questions I've raised. If you feel I haven't increased your knowledge of professional development - that I haven't given you the clear and unambiguous start to your conference that you expected - then I can only refer you to another "text" for managers which I put alongside President Truman's comment for its insight. This time it's from a British Prime Minister - Herbert Asquith. "Am I not right", he asked, "in my fixed belief that the expected rarely happens?"

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